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You should have seen our river's roof of ice
In winter, when the four-horse sledges made
Two long processions, crossing.

THE CHASM FLOWER

BY

JASPER BARNETT COWDIN

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SONGS.

		PAGE.
I.	"Lightly away"	16
II.	"Waters, awake in woodland ways!" .	20
III.	"Pleasant are the shadow-leaves" . .	28
IV.	"The dreary, dreary minstrels" . .	30
V.	"Love! Love! where hath he found" .	38
VI.	"Under us lay the flowers so gay" .	38

As the most forward bud
Is eaten by the canker ere it blow,
Even so by love the young and tender wit
Is turned to folly.

—SHAKSPEARE.

She loosed my hand and fled to be pursued.
While all with flying shouts ran down the hill.

THE CHASM FLOWER.

I.

FOUR little troubadours were we those days,
Wild as the rabbits on our hazel slopes,
Our homes high o'er the village of Dunleith—
Perched o'er the Mississippi, where the bluffs
Rise nobly, and the city of Dubuque
Lies a gray snowdrift on the opposite shore.

Four little troubadours on the green heights,
And merry, for no fences hemmed us in:
What need of fences where the ancient woods
Leaned solemn at the door? So there we played
Day after day, ransacking every nook,
And traced the infant water to its birth,
Or watched our bonfires in the wild ravine.

When morning visited the breezy bluffs
With sunshine, and the cries of happy birds
Blew in from the fresh fields to waken us,
Nelly Parkes, the wheelwright's daughter, William Vane,
The river pilot's boy, quaint Martha Winter,
And I their noisiest, Albert Gray, flew out

From neighbor cottages to our old haunts
Of bush and meadow, romping free till dusk.

All the wide woods belonged to us; the deep
And wild ravine was ours; the blossoms felt
No other hands; the birds our voices knew.
Accustomed grew our eyes to splendid scenes
Of flashing river and blue distant hills,
Whereon the soft clouds rested in their march.

One morning out upon the crumbling bluffs
We rolled great bowlders down, and watched the specks
Of mimic life in the toy-town below,
Or followed with our eyes the trails of white
Left all along the opposite shore, where wound
The yellow train; its clatter and loud shriek
Woke up the drowsy bluffs and set them talking.
A huge dark log-raft creeping down the stream,
Three little cabins on it, charmed us next;
The wee black things now here, now there, were men,
Whose shouts came up to us at intervals.
"I 'll be a pilot when I 'm old enough,"
Said William, stretched before us on the grass.
Nelly looked down at him admiringly,
And Martha's eyes were raised to question mine,
Then turned to note the ferry, turtle-shaped,
Spin two long threads of silver as it crossed.
"And what will you be, Albert?" Nelly asked,
Though stooped to tie her garter; and I said,
"Oh, I do n't know—Will wants to marry you;
Let 's all live here together!"
A strange cry
Rose from the still ravine, and we all stopped

To listen. Could it be some savage beast?
"Or may be those two eagles," Martha said,
"That yesterday we saw in the dead tree."
"Or some one trying to break out of jail,"
I whispered most impressively. The jail
Stood in the gloomiest hollow of the chasm,
Its ghost-white walls a dread we quickly passed,
Or fled if any face peered through the bars.

The cry rose not again; but the firm step
Of a descending workman in the glen
Echoed along the narrow planks, then died.
The universal stillness where we sat
Subdued our talk; till Martha's charming eyes
Began their playful witchcraft with my own,
And springing up I snatched at her red beads;
She loosed my hand and fled to be pursued,
While all with flying shouts ran down the hill.

So passed the green-clad months. When frosty fires
Of autumn turned our hazel bushes red,
And the keen edge of southward-flying winds
Cut off the leaves, we gathered in the nuts,
Or chased the rabbits through the undergrowth.

You should have seen our river's roof of ice
In winter, when the four-horse sledges made
Two long processions crossing hence and back.
The mile-long stretch of travelers afoot
Seemed from our height merely a dotted line.
You should have seen our hillsides white with snow,
Their sparkling coats worn smooth as polished glass
From coasting: all the village heard the sport
Of hundreds shouting late under a full moon.

II.

Our care-free childhood fading into youth
Brought school-days, and a change wherein we felt
The hand of Custom laid upon our lives.
Sunk in a roadside hollow stood the church,
Our little school in the low gallery,
Whence looking down we saw the altar-place
White with its mystic symbols, cross and saints.

As yet unchanged our childish preferences:
The eyes of Martha nestling near my heart
Took shelter, as twin violets 'neath one leaf;
And oft from school returning, William's step
Grew manlier at the side of Nelly—proud
To own him grown so tall, yet more reserved
In speech with him One afternoon she blushed
Quite prettily, his finger pointing out
The break-neck cliff where once we freely jumped
Into the quicksand hollow, sprawling wild.

By thinking on those far-off pleasant days,
Break into singing, heart! if so you will:—

Lightly away
From workaday
My thoughts shall sweetly glide—
O dreaming-time, blest dreaming-time!
The skies are bright at dreaming-time;
For countless gems then sparkle high,
As countless in the tide,
Whereon I float
In my gorgeous boat
To the Past, all glorified.

Far, far away
From workaday
My thoughts shall sweetly dwell—
O dreaming-time, blest dreaming-time !
By her dear side at dreaming-time.
Pearl-tinted angels seem the clouds ;
The winds that faint and swell
Have mystic tone
For us alone
In the bright Past loved so well.

The first warm day of a remembered spring,
When winds were soft, the river clear of ice,
The sunshine bringing with it subtle joy,
A tribe of Indians filed through the town
On ponies mud-bespattered—gorgeous braves,
Boys, ugly squaws, pappooses three a side
Strapped to the last slow nag, and one young girl
Attending. Through the main street single file
They passed, and pitched their tents outside the town.
All day the muffled thud of moccasins
Fell on the wooden sidewalks, cautious eyes
Of children meanwhile peeping from the pane.

That night their dances in the public Hall
Drew thither half the village, we as well.
Though timid at the savage whoops and yells
Within the narrow circle, we stood by
Until the squaws revolved in close-set ring
Around their central sun the drum ; but when
The urchins, naked half and leaping wild,
Appeared, we wandered past the scattered groups
Of bead venders, weird under torch-flared smoke.

One fierce buck, fiercer made by fiery drink,
Suddenly through a window plunged his arm.
The noise of breaking glass, half-uttered cries,
So startled Nelly that she swooned; but, falling,
A timely arm to save her interposed
Ere William turned—a stranger to us all,
Well clad, and well at ease with all the world,
And well-to-do if Martha's thought were right,
His dark eyes full of passionate lightnings,
And dangerously beautiful. He ran
And brought a bowl of water, doing most
To waken Nelly. Her returning smile
Greeted him first; her beauty pleased him much
William was quick to see, who bit his lip
Uneasily, and wished the stranger gone.
Our new acquaintance grew so affable,
So talked with us, his eyes on Nelly turned
(A trifle o'er-attentive, William thought),
That we were captivated at his will,
Save William; his unreasonable dislike
Had reason, for that night his love was born.
Mounting the bluffs toward home, our quiet shafts
Failed of their covert purpose; Nelly laughed
Half playfully at him, and almost forgot
Both mood and stranger with the morrow dawn;
But William nursed his humor for a week.

Three times the moon grew broad and fell away
To a thin strip, and now for the fourth time
Was late in rising, when one night we went
With quips and laughter to a country dance.
Our new acquaintance, Sidney Reed, was there,
Caught the light fancy of the country girls,
And turned their cheeks with many a compliment.

Ah, Nelly! why was she that night so fair,
So sylphlike in her dress of floating lawn?
Why was her foot so full of mischief then?
It seemed the birth of music when she spake,
And music's death when silent she became.
All pressed about her, foremost her new friend,
Who danced with her. And Nelly's soft brown eyes
Threw a bright glance at William as she passed,
Triumphing a little coquettishly.
"Well matched together," some one whispered near.
William both saw and heard; his fair cheeks flushed.
Her dimpled arm upon that stranger's sleeve
Annoyed poor William; he at all the world
Felt angered, and could find no reason for it.
So, stealing from the gayety and lights,
He passed into the quiet night alone.

A storm seemed brewing, and the monster moon
Hung like a scarlet city in the clouds
Low at the veiled horizon. Swarming lights
Flashed from the sleeping city opposite.
Save for the switching freight trains in the dark
Below him, a brief whistle from a craft
Somewhere, to hint of commerce yet awake,
The whole earth seemed depopulate and void.
Around him all the leaves hung still as death.
"Because he is so handsome I am rude,"
Mused William, as he wandered on the slope;
"If this be love, I would I had not found it.
All things disturb me lately—I am rude!
How foolish I become! What shall I do?
Foolish or not, this night I speak to her,
And free my heart of these annoying doubts."

The light leaves moved uneasily in their sleep
As drifting music reached him. He turned back
To seek the dance again ; yet scarcely found
The garden path ere Nelly in his arms
Fell like a frightened fluttering butterfly.
"O William ! take me home—I must go home !
Ask me not why—not now—but do this thing
For my sake, and let not the people know.
Bring out my hood, and hurry !—while I wait."
Her strange appeal perplexed him ; he obeyed,
Though blindly, and went with her down the shades.

The moon had cast aside her last disguise
And walked in naked majesty the heavens,
Our follower all the way to Martha's door
When later we returned—both wondering why
So early our companions slipped away ;
Less piqued, each moment valued as a pearl,
Had we surmised that walk our last in youth.

III.

Waters, awake in woodland ways !
Awake ! awake ! ye sylvan fays ;
The whisper runs o'er meadow and plain
That dainty Spring is coming again.
Already is the fun begun,
And bound to last till set of sun ;
The woods are trimmed for holiday,
And *As You Like It* is the play.

So my little lady coming
Sets the yellow bee humming,
And the wild brier budded
Gives a promise of the rose ;

So my little lady coming
Sets the yellow bee humming,
And the wild brier budded
Gives a promise of the rose.

Heigh ho, swing low, happy, happy children !
In the green, green valley
E'en the water-lily knows
Ye should hurry into blossom
O'er the earth's gay bosom,
For my coming little lady
Wears a glow already
Like the wild, wild beauty of the rose.

Her foot of all the revelers' seen
Will trip the prettiest on the green ;
She 'll lift her flounce in trim curvet,
And lightly snap the castanet.
The birds will sing, and many a wing
Will flash a shadow in the spring,
Whose waters lightly ripple away,
As blue as the eyes of my lady gay.

So my little lady coming
Sets the yellow bee humming,
And the wild brier budded
Gives a promise of the rose ;
Heigh ho, swing low, happy, happy children !
In the green, green valley
E'en the water-lily knows
Ye should hurry into blossom
O'er the earth's gay bosom,
For my coming little lady
Wears a glow already
Like the wild, wild beauty of the rose.

Maytime again, and to the robin's flute
The orchards whitened. All about the slopes
Of Nelly's arbor flew the swallow-crowds,
Herself a mated bird in William's nest.

Merry the day we had when they were wed !
Merry the day, but to its shining heel
A shadow, and that shadow most on me :
My little sweetheart's father dreampt of gold,
And Martha like a setting hope went down
Behind the Rocky Mountains.

In the dusk
Of one still even, in the holy calm
Of twilight, when the river lay as gold,
One bright star in the saffron west and one
Above the chasm, and William's heart at rest,
Unutterably full of Nature's peace,
His homeward steps awoke the flushed ravine,
Bridge, spile, embankment, loosely-winding plank
Answering; yet of faster pace his mind,
Thinking what plants that night he would set out,
How make his garden brighter, where to spade
For water, and the hundred little jots
That love delights in : these as he revolved
Between his whistle and the snatch of song,—

> I 'll build my nest in her sweet breast,
> And rear my little darlings there,

He reached the last wide curve, the hazel clump,
Passed by it, and his cottage rose in sight.

One step less quickly, he had never caught
(So trifles turn our lives !) a misty glimpse
Of Sidney Reed just fading from the door
And down the opposite slope. His old dislike
Shot up that instant in its old-time shape
Familiarly. What errand brought the man ?
Long absent from the town, but now come back,
What business had he at their cot ? "Ah, well,

Hasty wrath makes many apologies,"
Thought William; "I will wait for Nelly's words."

Now Nelly had told her husband of that night
She fled to him and begged him take her home;
How Sidney, thinking her a trifle gay,
Had followed from the dance-room when she left
In search of William; how beyond the lights,
Both standing in the oak tree's mystic lure,
He breathed unholy thoughts in her chaste ear.

What business had he there, then? William's eye
Burned dangerously. Nay, he would not speak
To Nelly of it; he would let her say
What errand brought the man.
Across the gate
He kissed the lovely petals o'er her chin
As usual, her kind eyes looking up
Clear as the zenith stars then looking down—
She spake no word of Sidney.
In their cot
The young wife poured his tea; while William watched
Her flittings to and fro, and vaguely thought,
"How can she do it so delightfully,
Deceitfully, the keeping of this thing?"

Soon his brow darkened, and he went not out
Into his garden; rising from the board,
He sought the window, idly gazing far,
As if he watched the night boat steaming up—
The great WAR EAGLE glaring on the waves
Below him, all her path a shower of sparks.

Nelly, her cups and silver placed aside,
Stole up behind him, on his shoulder hung,
And ran her soothing fingers through his hair.
"Are you tired to-night, William?" "No," he said.
Then growing silent also at his side,
She mused on Sidney's visit. Should she tell
Her husband of his boldness? He to come
Asking her pardon! really, to again
Look on her face, and by that more to offend.
"Not now; some lighter moment I may choose;
It is his business worries him. If now,
It might bring strife between them. Never fear,
My coldness will prevent his visits more."

Ten elfin silver notes cheered the still room.
The woman, borne away through shimmering dreams,
Heard music and the stir of happy crowds;
The man was kept awake by staring doubts.

Their little breakfast was a dull affair;
And furtively the wife glanced at his cheek,
Fearful of illness brooding over him.
When at the fragrant door he gave her lips
The frosty kiss of waning love, and looked
One moment in her eyes, a tiny tear,
Cradled like Moses, in her lashes rocked.
"What is the matter, William? You are strange.
Tell me, is it my fault? have I done wrong?"
Had he then spoken, all had been made clear;
But the dark father of perversity
Crowded him on to utter foolishness.
Her love-awakening eyes in soulful prayer
Burned to his bosom, and half playfully
Her arms, a silver link about his neck,

Were fain to keep him; yet he cast aside
Those tender bonds, and saying moodily,
"Off, let me go—I am late already,"
Brushed hastily the wayside dew, and felt
The sunrise all around him darker grow
Each instant, and himself some frightful dream.

He somehow found his way down the ravine,
Yet knew not if he touched the earth or whirled
Above it—what he was, or whither bound.
Ah!—not real. He never had been harsh
To his dear Nelly. Why—the humor of it!
He even smiled a little nervously;
Became himself a moment; and a strong
Desire grew on him forthwith to rush back,
Clasp his hurt wife, and laugh the thing aside:
But now an evil spirit in his feet
Prevented his return, and he kept on.
Then dawned the thought of leaving all at once—
His childhood's home, friends, everything;
Under far skies and unfamiliar stars
Find all things new, begin anew, be true.
Next—he would work as usual that day,
Come home as usual, kiss her the same,
Ask no nice questions, and forget his doubt.
The impure spirit whispered, "Get you gone;
You spoke too harshly for *her* to forget;
You struck her deeper than you meant; you must
Confess your doubt before her candid eyes—
She will demand the reason of your words;
And she will pity you to her last day.
Your happiness is over—get you gone!"
So he that lying spirit first believed,

Then doubted, then believed again; and still
Kept onward down the chasm toward the town.

"What, Nelly! you in tears? The matter, child?"
Thus cried her mother coming through the dew
That morning, from her home across the fields;
And Nelly, in a heap beside the fire,
Sobbed out her grief despairingly. "Dear child,
You make too much of such a little thing.
If you are not at fault, he will come home
As usual, good-humored. Now cheer up."

So she put on a countenance of cheer,
And watched the changes of that perfect day.
So leisurely the sun to zenith rose;
So imperceptibly the shadow-spires
Wheeled to the purpling east; so anxiously
She waited for the first white star in heaven!
And when it came it found no prettier soul
Than Nelly in her best gown, her soft hair
Waved to its loveliest fashion, round her neck
A velvet ribbon, and her apron white
As moonlight.

She then, busied with her fare,
Hummed with the singing kettle on the flame;
Brought out their nicest china; at their plates
Put the stored napkin-rings, a wedding gift
As yet unused; and now the clock chimed six.
Each stroke removed a load from Nelly's heart.
He must be on the way now; would she take
A little stroll to meet him? or may be
'T were better she should kiss him at the gate.
The scent of steaming tea filled the small house;

Canary Dick from singing the whole day
Drooped on his perch, a mere puffed yellow ball;
The gathering shadows in the cosy room
Soon scattered from the lamplight's cheerfulness
Shed o'er the table, white with shining ware.

Still Nelly sat and listened anxiously,
Excitedly, for his returning step.
She caught a sound—her pulse gave a quick start—
'T was a wild rabbit underneath the floor.
The silver timepiece tinkled seven chimes,
And she arose, impatient at his stay.
What ill-timed matter could be keeping him?

She took her hat and wandered into cool
Night-fragrance, passing down the wooded slope
With some vague thought of meeting him; and though
The kindly eyes of even bent on her
Their silence, and the quiet of the hills
Seemed deep as immortality, she pined
For nothing but his face: the far-off worlds
For her had nothing in them: her one wish
Ungratified, she turned back to her cot,
A little longer there to idly wait.

Her mother reappearing at the door
Found her again in tears. "What, Nelly child!
You crying yet? and has he not been home?
Hark; I 'll send Philip down and get some word."
Homeward she swept across the dew, and back
To comfort Nelly; while her little son
Sped townward and returned, saying he found
The office windows dark, the door close barred,
The lanterned watchman to his quest replying
That William had not been at work that day.

IV.

Pleasant are the shadow-leaves
Flecking the cool path;
Ebon spire in still lake hath
Its dream; the eye perceives
Beauty where the shadows roll
Billow-wise from knoll to knoll;
Lovely too and rare
The silhouettes that sleep on moonlit snow.
Shadows, shadows, here and there,
Into winsome dalliance start;
But ah—there should be no,
No shadow on the heart!

The sceneries of dawn and noon and night
Shifted their shadows thrice upon the hills;
The gossips had their say and quieted;
The great globe whirling eastward brought the town
Once more beneath the sun—and from the lost
A white square found its way to Nelly's hand.
Between her nervous fingers as she read
The letter trembled like a leaf in March
Scarce fastened to its twig.
Then gleamed her eyes
Bright as the solitary midnight star
That, curtained by the tempest, yet looks forth
In unclouded splendor on a rocking world.
"He deems me false to him—that is my worth,
Known to him from my earliest years. Dear God!
Is this his love—his value of my heart?"
Her woman's pride towered above her tears;
She thrust his letter from her scornfully;
But all her great love straightway overwhelmed

Her breaking soul; and sinking under it,
Cried hoarsely, ravingly, "Come back, my love!
William!—you love me yet—come back—come back!"

V.

Thus had the dread abyss yawned suddenly,
Love on both sides, no silver bridge across,
Both innocent lives bandied by mocking fates:
For Nelly, urged by fiery impulse, fled
(In secret, lest her mother bar the way,)
To that place whence the letter came; not less,
Even more eager to embrace her again,
Repentant of his letter, of his haste,
Came William under mask of night—to find
Their cottage tenantless and bare; to hear
That she had fled—and Sidney also gone
The selfsame day.
Then, as the sunward spark
Pauses and wheels, and toward the dark again
Speeds backward, mayhap never to return,
So William from that spot attracting him
Receded to the outer world; became
Confirmed in his belief of Nelly's guilt;
And through the glitter of great cities passed,
A solitary and a wanderer.

VI.

Surely two anxious beings welcomed her,
When Nelly back to the parental roof
Swept by her grief, bowed 'twixt her mother's knees.
"You are not utterly left desolate,
Dear daughter; wear you now a face of cheer,
For your own sake, and for that other's sake,

The little solace coming to your life.
When William hears of it he will return."

But Nelly shook her brow slowly and said,
"Nay, mother; is the child not best unborn,
Than having a father, never see his face?"

VII.

The dreary, dreary minstrels
Rattle on the pane,
Autumn's naked branches
And the freezing rain.
Clatter, clatter, rat tat,
How the windows ring!
The wind 's a lively jester,
But I wish that it were spring.

For the springtime comes,
And the summertime goes,
And the yellow leaves of autumntime
Lie buried in the snows;
But ere we're done sighing
The wintertime's flying,
And we hurry to the meadow where the violet blows.

The dreary, dreary minstrels,
Tapping all the day,
Set my spirit thinking
Of its early May.
Youthful dreams and fancies
Thronged in splendid train—
O jolly was the springtime!
Will it ever come again?

Yes! the springtime comes,
And the summertime goes,
And the yellow leaves of autumntime
Lie buried in the snows;
But ere we're done sighing
The wintertime's flying,
And we hurry to the meadow where the violet blows.

Still the great globe spun on her ice-lit poles
Around the sun, shelled in her crust of clouds,
Bringing days bright and dark, the varied days
Woven in months, the months outspread in years.
Nor a less change came on the busy lives
Of swarming millions drifting with the ball:
Souls coming from the outer blackness pierced
Earth's pleasant blue, and made themselves a place
Among her strugglers; had their playtimes, hopes,
Fears, joys, pains, sorrows; fought for ant-hill rights
In true ant-earnest; had their say of things;
And wore the little path at morn and even
From this to that; then suddenly—dropped all,
Returning through that blackness whence they came.

One year my father, restless in his place,
And seldom an anchored vessel, took us east,
To harbor in the loud metropolis.

Changes enough came on the parted lives
Of William and Nelly. Wide the frightful gulf,
No shining thread of any bridge begun;
And of their varied fortunes ignorant
As beings bred in alien climes, they felt
Shadow and sun, and, busied like the rest,
Half lost their one grief under new events,
New moments of bright joy, new hours of pain—

Forgot, but never wholly; for at times
The hidden loneliness rose in a sigh
To tell that love yet lived. Though sundered far
To mortal eyes, they were not so apart
But what their spirits mingled oft in dreams.

One night, in a great city given up
To gay magnificence, at a rich ball
William was present, liveliest of his friends,
A sportive sunbeam on a sea of smiles.
The dark unlovely specter of his life
Rose not before him then: enjoyment-tossed,
With music as a pulse to laughing eyes,
White arms, white bosoms, perfume-shedding silks,
And dainty ankles whirled incautiously,
Rendered he back the covert glances thrown,
Nor once thought of the past.
Yet that same night
His lovely wife lay on the wind-swept bluffs,
Watched by her sleepless mother. There his hand
Should have held hers in sympathy; but she,
All unsustained by that love needed most,
Renewed his image in a pretty son.

VIII.

As the years rose and sank behind her path,
The still cold light of hallowed sorrow grew
To be a part of Nelly's face, and gave
That sainted calm only its presence brings.
The neighbors too thought kindly of her, and sought
The cunning of her hand at fashioning
Their garments: she could do what none else could
With worn coats turned to fit the little lads—
So daily taxed with importunity

That, ere she grew aware, her own fair babe
Slipped into boyhood, shouted down the bluffs,
And jumped his little bonfires in the chasm.

Her eyes were slow to see it; yet one day
The blithe lad bursting in from school upon her,
Swayed playfully on her knee, pulled her soft cheek,
And asked to go to college. Would she mind
His absence from her? At that word her heart
Rebelled like an imprisoned fountain; yet—
"Go if you will; but oh, my only joy!
What will your mother do here in the West
With you in far New England? I do love
These dear old hills where both of us were born,
But to be near you is a greater blessing."

This thing soon coming to the aged pair,
The kind grand-parents, never quite at ease
In the new land, and loving the staid town
Of former days, turned from the fenceless wild
To eastward: more contentment to them came
In looking on the cultivated fields
And stone-built fences of Connecticut.

IX.

Another year unfolded wings and sped,
The heart-gulf wide as ever, yet its lines
Half faded in the shrouding mists of time,
When for a little family festival
The group was gathered, pushing merrily
The chimed Thanksgiving. Nelly's tall-grown son,
Then back from college, tagged his mother's hem,

And teasing her, made laughter shake the house.
Ruddy his cheeks with health; his fearless eyes
Too oft unconscious daggers to the breast
That nursed him—all too like his father's eyes.

Ah me! That night, when snow lay deep without,
And warm home comforts brought a glow within,
And cheerful faces beamed in company,
Lone William, friendless in a burning clime
Among the harsh rough miners, and laid low
By fever, mumbled in his grimy tent
Words the sole watcher heard not. He had made
A fortune; made and lost it; hither come
To gain another; and anxiety
Brought him thus low.
That night a vision dawned
Before the haggard worn-out man: so bright
The silver shine of circumambient cloud,
Wherein all radiant and lifelike stood
His Nelly; o'er her shoulder a fair face
So like his own—might it not be a son?
Both smiled upon him that angelically,
Waking he groaned—and lo! the morn had come.
It searched his bare tent with a lamp of gold;
Looked on the rough-clad watcher prone asleep;
And brought the sick, not music and a dream,
But blasphemy with sound of pickaxe joined.

The heavy-haired adventurers, unskilled
In sick-room arts, nursed him through clumsily;
But had not a new hope in him sustained
His weakness, he had died on the hot plain.
Such vigor with the new hope came to him
That in a twelvemonth he a fortune gained.
Then to himself and to none other soul
He whispered, "I will see the living Flower
Born of her gentle spirit touching mine."

X.

Death, you are dark enough at any time,
E'en though mad grief invite. Why mock us, friend,
By coming when our feast is happiest?
Nelly my playmate ne'er did you a wrong,
Yet six brief suns from her Thanksgiving-time
You came with sudden shadow and passed by,
Bearing her father with you. In brief while
You came again, and left her parentless.
Then to her son she clung passionately,
And found an ark on his affectionate breast,
The while he soothed her brow and breathed his trust:
"Dear mother, am I not still by your side?
Now by God's overshadowing mercy,
Though I should die, He will be kind to you."

XI.

The ship came in—the ship came in ahead
Of expectation. Over ringing steels
The modern powers hurled an eager soul
Westward two nights, two days, and put him down
Beside the well-known river flushed with gold.

The dying day kissed by the new-crowned night
Scarce faded, scarce the quieter reign grew firm,
Ere William, travel-stained, bewildered, stood
Amid surroundings more changed than himself,
And looked about for faces. O'er the chasm
His old familiar friend the evening star
Looked down complacently—all else was new.
Tears then had written something on his cheeks,
Had he not been so sure of welcome there:
Success one might have seen in his clear eyes—
Eyes always bright, but more divinely blue
From love's anticipation. As he turned—

"What! William?—is it you? Hello, my lad!"
His old employer slapped him on the back,
The hearty western greeting kindling both.
The first free whiff of friendliness o'erpassed,
O disappointment! O hard test of faith!
Nelly not there. He had depended, fool!
On a mere dream, a vague presentiment,
A sort of bright illusion in his brain,
Drawing him there. Long gone? how far? which way?
And living with her people? *Had a son?*
Ah—glorious assurance of his dream!

Though wearied by the constant-swinging train,
Though pressed to tarry, he that night was hurled
Back toward the morning.

XII

All things find a close;
And they are favored spirits who receive
Half the reward hope promises. 'T were just
That half his dream should disappointment find;
She being not at fault, t' were simply just
She should the greater joy receive from Heaven.
Joys delayed are sweeter when they come;
But joys are double joys when they surprise us.
And lo! he came when she looked not for him—
Too blinded by her tears to look for him—
He came in her dark hour.

The friends of both
Arranged it—friends the Angel brings with him,
Who under his sad shadow quietly
Perform the little needful kindnesses.

All the hosts of Joy
Came in a shower of glittering rain.

The wanderer they brought into the room
Where lay his coffined son—ne'er seen in life,
First seen in death—and thence the mother led,
And left the three together.

He bowed down
To kiss their dead white Flower; then looking up,
Beheld her there—and all the hosts of Joy
Came in a shower of glittering rain, and closed
The chasm forever.

* * * * * *

When before that time
Did utter grief and supreme happiness
Burst in together on the human heart
So suddenly?—as if a tempest-bolt,
Hurled through the dark, changed to a singing flight
Of gentle spirits! Under the tragic cloud
Those two, transfigured, knew not how to act,
What next to say.

In the hushed company,
The minister then reading solemn words,
Pale Nelly, veiled before the listeners,
Reproached her heart for its unseemly glee;
And William scorned his own for being so light
At his son's funeral. A touching scene,
To see those poor souls trying to conceal
Their bliss, which would not be concealed, but ran—
Spite of occasion and propriety—ran
Along each feature, each relaxing curve,
Swift as the sunbeams bringing up the day,
And lit both faces gloriously—the more
As they with helpless wills remonstrated.
As vainly in his topmost heaven the lark
Might strive to brush the sunlight off his wings!

So came, so bloomed, so died, the Chasm Flower,
A blossom strange between two sundered lives.
Yet stranger is this mystery of love,
That only from such thorn such joy could rise;
Than the romantic passion, their first dower,
Far deeper bloomed the reunited love.

Love! Love! where hath he found
Grief so deep joy may abound?
How can Love above his wound
More delightful grow?
Is it not that Love is still
Master over good and ill,
All the world at last to fill—
Tell us, is it so?

Love, thou comest tenderly,
Tenderly, tenderly;
With the all-things passing by
Must thy fragrance go?
Thou art not an earthly rose
Scattered o'er the grave's repose,
Finding there untimely close;
No, Love, ah no!

What of love in the bud? Shall that too pass
And leave its fragrance in the memory?
E'en there 't is sweet; so you shall hear of it:—

Under us lay the flowers so gay,
And over us clouds of pearl,
And many a day flew lightly away
When we were boy and girl.

Our fingers, oft white with butterfly-meal,
Found mischief enough to do;
Ah, were we now near together,
Would our hearts be as true?
Were we now that near together,
Would we our love renew?

Lashes of jet, eyes deep violet,
Artistic disorder of curl—
It is with me yet! it is with me yet!
Love's undissolving pearl.
Our playmates, my dear, found Love's lesson hard;
From years of grief in the breast,
At last Love drew them together,
To be more deeply blest:
Far back in the past their sorrow
Lies in eternal rest.

XIII.

"Come out and see us; drop your books awhile;
Why keep aloof so long? Your willows now
Are budding: you remember those four trees
Fronting the small white cottage at the end
Of the main village road? Well, they are ours.
In play you used to own them. Passing eyes
Look up in wonder still, they are so tall,
Their slender spires of such an even size.
Up on the bluffs, your old home empty stands;
The panes are broken in, the chain-well leans
Decaying, but your pear tree flourishes.
We climbed the path last Sabbath, and looked down
Upon the opening river isled with ice,
And watched a solitary rower cross

In his black skiff, no other craft in sight.
We have for you a cosy sun-cheered room;
You might content yourself a season with us;
More, you should come to please our little girl."

Such the warm invitation reaching me
From Nelly and William. Wearied of the roar,
Nor having aught that moment to detain,
One even, dropping in a crimson seat,
I rumbled from the flared metropolis.

Delightful, thus to swing around the hills
Of Pennsylvania in the early dawn!
The bowery maze of woodlands bursting bud;
The golden gaze of morning down the vales;
The hillsides beaded with ten thousand lights,
Wild swaying in the happy breath of spring;
The first green hints of harvest on the slopes;
And beautiful thy rest, fair Susquehanna,
Thou mirror of the clouds!

No present care,
All pleasing expectations bright ahead,
Less wonder I felt borne through Eden-fields,
As, dreamily leaning, watched I lawless bands
Of bluebirds fussily plotting in the bush,
Or, larking away into the nearest woods,
Fled from our thunders. Week-old butterflies
Wavered above the April violets
At every little station garden-plot.

One twilight shrieked our whistle for the last;
And under darkening arches moving slow,
Ere we yet stopped, came William through the car,

Grasping me warmly, picking up my load,
And hurrying me off with him up the street
Of the new village—new, for nothing old
Remained for standstill memory to claim
With pleasure—not a landmark in the dusk.

Nay; there was no mistaking those dear trees
Off yonder! When we reached their shadows, hark—
A child's "They 're coming!" from the garden plot
Rose silverly, and four blue eyes at us
Beamed through the pickets. "Come, Will, how is this?
You wrote of only one." "Yes; wait and see."
Both cherubs he took up and bore aloft
To Nelly at the porch. * * Ah, beautiful,
Still beautiful! more quiet in her charm
Of motherhood; her greeting earnest, calm,
A world of warm sincerity that thrilled
The very soul of friendship.

Who will paint
My last surprise? One of the little tots
Brought from an inner room, towed by the skirt,
Her "my mamma." Never such violet eyes,
Never such low soft voice, such manners quaint,
Belonged to any creature born save Martha!
Frankly we kissed each other, infant eyes
Observant, sober, dubious the while,
A source of keen amusement to us all
As round the board we gossiped of old days.

Aha! that tiny image by her side—
What of it? Would the father soon appear?
The eyes not all unlike the mother's eyes,
Having the same elusive charm to slip

Recall of memory. Was the father dark,
That she should have dark hair? The father, too—
Was he some Crœsus Californian,
Generous, brave, the first voice of his town?
Thereat a pang of narrow jealousy
Came for a moment.

* * * * * *

"Yes, her husband died;
Dear fellow, he was good and kind to her.
She married him against her love, I fancy;
But all her mother's heart was set on him.
He died before the little one had a month
Brightened their home."

So Nelly spoke to me,
With William sitting by us late that night,
And Martha with her cherub gone for rest.
"Her visit," William muttered, "here has been
The pleasantest, but now she thinks to go.
Having remained to see you, she shall stay
A little longer." Then we rose to part.
"You must be shaken up with your long travel,"
Said Nelly, bidding me a soft good-night;
And William added, "Take your ease at morn."

To bed, but there to lie awake and hear
The strangest whispers in the willow-tops,
And through the effortless lapse of the still hours
Think on the bygone years—to realize
The old yet new surroundings. Helping me,
Looked through the pane that same old friendly star
That nightly used to find my lattice-chink;
And far across the river, at its hour,
The well-known freight train rumbled through the gap,
Bound for Sioux City.

Love had come to them,
My playmates; and my barren bachelor life
Seemed doubly barren more as I beheld
That full-blown flower of many a dream, my Martha,
Clung to by that young bud—her sign of love
Shared with some other. She was lost to me,
She was beyond me now, that lovely woman!
Her swan-white bosom oft in dreams I claimed
For mine alone, and pressed against my own.
I who had ne'er believed in second love,
High heaven! should I wed a widow now?
I never could believe; but where was I
To find a virgin Martha? Just like her
Would never do—it must be none but her.

So there I foundered on my prejudice;
And sunk in deep sleep knew not that the morn
Had risen, till the Sabbath bells outpealed.

XIV.

I might weave on my thread of gossamer,
And tell of many happy days, and how
We mounted bluffs and visited scenes dear
To childhood, but the telling wearies you;
The end is seen already, yet you wait
The formal closing. Here is all my heart:—

William and Nelly at a sick friend's house,
The children tucked away to bed and dreams,
Out in the moonlight, cosily together,
We twain together on the moonlit porch,
Serene and quiet like the night around,
In careless fashion chatted, she mayhap

All unaware of passion's soft approach.
With sudden boldness I drew nearer her,
Pressing her fingers. Love hid in the heart
Will show itself at the eyes. She looked in mine.
She knew! she knew! yet listened silently
How I had cherished even her memory;
And now beholding her, must call her mine,
Or ever live more miserably. Why,
Why not together happy now as then?
And I would prove a father to her child;
Contented anywhere in the world with her.
She trembled some; an answering teardrop, warm
From her heart's fountain, fell upon my wrist.

Come, come! the moon is low; 't is April-time;
You have my song, so hie you off to sleep.
Birds blithely mate and build in blossom-time—
Why should not old-time lovers do the same?

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